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ABSTRACT

This report contains information on the 1980 Basic Skills Assessment Writing Sample that the New Mexico State Department of Education administered to over 1,000 tenth grade students. Sections of the report provide the following information: (1) background data and an explanation of holistic scoring, which was used in the assessment; (2) illustrations of student performance on the four writing tasks (an application form, a business letter, an abbreviated message/announcement, and a reminiscence essay), including both well-written and poorly written student work to explain scorers' ratings; (3) a note on making pass/fail decisions after the writing samples had been rated; and (4) the implications of student writing performance for teaching that resulted from the assessment. Appendixes contain a discussion of the organization/procedures of the scoring process, and a summary of statistical data from the 1980 assessment. (RL)

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# NEW MEXICO WRITING: A STATEWIDE SAMPLE

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Written by:

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Elementary and Secondary Education Unit
New Mexico State Department of Education
Santa Fe, New Mexico

January 1981

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# PREFACE

This document, "New Mexico Writing: A Statewide Sample," provides a description of student performance on each of the four tasks of the Basic Skills Assessment Writing Sample test administered under the aegis of the State Department of Education during Spring, 1980. Because these four tasks are similar to the four required in the Student Writing Skills Appraisal portion of the New Mexico High School Proficiency Examination, the Department chose this test as the one on which to base the following report. A discussion of the holistic rating process as well as implications for writing programs and classroom teaching are also included.

We hope that local school districts will utilize the descriptions contained herein and compare them with the results achieved in local administrations of the Student Writing Skills Appraisal. It is not our intention to prescribe what each district sets as its local standards on this portion of the proficiency examination. A document succeeding the present one will offer several sets of prescriptive criteria, gathered from a variety of sources, which districts may choose to utilize in setting local standards.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Writing Sample. The Basic Skills Assessment Writing Sample test was given in April 1980 to approximately 1,000 tenth-grade students in several New Mexico high schools under the aegis of the State Department of Education (SDE).* The Writing Sample test was developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS) of Princeton, N.J., and was purchased by the State Department of Education from Addison-Wesley Testing Service.

The purpose of the Writing Sample was to 1) provide the state with initial, base-line data for determining the level of student proficiency in writing throughout the state, and 2) disseminate comparative information to school districts to help refine local means of administering and scoring the Writing Appraisal portion of the New Mexico High School Proficiency Examination.

The Writing Sample test (see Appendix A) consisted of *four* different writing tasks: 1) an application form; 2) a business letter; 3) an abbreviated message or announcement; and 4) a reminiscence essay.

1.2 A Note on Scoring. Each task was scored by a team of 13 raters composed of State Department of Education staff members, teacher representatives, and one chief reader, Mr. Evans Alloway of ETS. The business letter and the reminiscence essay were each scored by two raters--working independently. The reminiscence essay was scored holistically using a scale of one to four, where four is the highest score and identifies the better pieces of writing in the sample and one serves as the lowest point on the scale identifying those pieces of writing which demonstrated the least quality. The business letter was scored in a "semi-holistic" manner--i.e., a process involving the use of a *scoring guide* which sets general "standards" for each point on a scale of one to four. Application forms and abbreviated messages/announcements were scored only once by single raters aided by scoring guides for assigning scores ("yes/no" in the case of application forms and one to four numerical scores in the case of abbreviated messages/announcements).

1.3 The Holistic Method. Subsequent to the introduction of the Writing Skills Appraisal in New Mexico in 1978, English teachers have either had first-hand experience with the holistic scoring method or have had it explained to them. Nevertheless, a description of this scoring process is incorporated here to aid teachers who have not used it or remain unclear about the process.

According to ETS, "holistic scoring" is an efficient, relatively inexpensive, and reliable method of rating large numbers of papers. It is a method which has been proven suitable for, and is currently

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*The 13 high schools involved were: Aztec, Cibola, Cloudcroft, Cuba, Des Moines, Ft. Sumner, Jemez Valley, Lordsburg, Mountainair, Reserve, Tatum, Tularosa, and Vaughn.

utilized in, most kinds of competency testing situations. Holistic scoring is based on the belief that the overall ("whole") impression that a written passage makes on a reader is more important than spelling, mechanics, syntax, organization, coherence, or any other single aspect or individual analytic category. A reader thus makes a scoring "decision" in much the same way that he determines whether a novel, newspaper article, or periodical essay is superior, mediocre, or poor. As ETS has postulated, the basic premises of the holistic scoring process are that each of the skill factors involved in writing is related to all others and that no one factor can be separated from the others. "Readers," according to Evans Alloway, "must judge each essay as a whole; ***they must read each paper*** *for the impression its totality makes."* [italics added]

> A misspelled word, a comma splice, a sentence fragment, a misplaced modifier should carry no great weight in scoring a paper. The candidate is entitled to make some mistakes. He or she is usually writing hurriedly in a tense situation, seldom with recourse to a dictionary, and with little time for deliberation. If readers read each paper as a whole, then, they are better able to judge the competence of the writer. If the paper is poorly written, that will be part of the reader's first impression; there is no need to analyze it word by word to decide that it is badly done. If the paper contains mistakes because the writer, though capable, has been forced to hurry, the reader will judge the general quality of the paper most effectively by reading it as a whole....*

Some papers, of course, cannot be judged quickly and immediately. These "problem" papers should ***not*** be read and reread by individual raters, but rather should be submitted to a "chief reader" for a final scoring decision. In fact, whenever a reader is unable to make a reasonably quick judgment, he should, without hesitation, submit that paper to a chief reader for scoring.

1.4 The Conduct of the Reading. The organization and logistics of the reading (scoring) process are relatively simple. As was stated above (Section 1.2), thirteen raters were involved in the reading and scoring of some 4,000 papers generated by approximately 1,000 students. Each student was to have responded to four writing assignments: the application form, business letter, announcement, and reminiscence essay. Some students did not respond to all four tasks, but the majority did.

The reading/scoring process for Task I (application form) and Task III (announcement) was straightforward. Readers were provided with scoring guides (see Chapter 2) for each of these two tasks. In the case of the application form, the scoring guide delineated specific

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*Evans Alloway, "Holistic Scoring Session for the New Jersey Writing Project: A Summary." Monmouth Junction, N.J.: New Jersey Writing Project, 1979, unpaginated.

criteria for making "yes/no" judgments. Since this task was short and clear, and since it involved only small amounts of student-generated writing, it was determined by both raters and chief reader that one reading would be sufficient for scoring this particular task. Thus, each application form was read only once and by a single rater.

Each announcement, too, was read only once and scored by a single rater. Scoring guides for announcements delineated criteria for each point on a four-point scale and were used to rate students' responses to the task. Those papers which proved best in the sample and most complete when measured against criteria established by the scoring guide were assigned "4's" by raters. Those less good and less complete were scored "3" or "2." And announcements which proved least good and least complete were assigned scores of "1."*

Each business letter (Task II) was read and scored independently by two different raters. Raters were assigned letter codes to insure that their scoring decisions were not influenced by those of other raters. That is, instead of placing a numerical score (e.g., "3") at the top of a given paper, a letter (e.g., "x") coded to the number "3" was placed on the student's paper and decoded at a later point subsequent to the reading. The use of some kind of "coding" system, then, is considered essential to maintaining consistently independent readings whenever two or more raters are involved in reading each paper.

Business letters were scored using a "semi-holistic" technique. That is, business letters were read for the overall ("whole") impressions which they made on raters; but raters' scoring decisions were ultimately arrived at through the use of a scoring guide which delineated criteria for each point on the scoring scale. These criteria included correct use of the elements of the standard business letter and the number of personal facts employed in the letter in addition to other factors. Thus, impressionistic decisions were supported and controlled by criteria established in the scoring guide (see Chapter 2).

Prior to the actual scoring of students' business letters and prior to designing the scoring guide for the business letter, the chief reader presented raters with a series of sample papers for scoring so that 1) raters could "calibrate" letters themselves to the range of performance or quality of business letters at hand, and 2) raters could discuss the various criteria which all thought should be incorporated at the four levels of the scoring guide against which papers would be rated.

It should be pointed out here that, in retrospect, raters agreed that scoring guides could have been designed somewhat differently; they could have provided clearer direction, thereby promoting greater effectiveness and optimum efficiency in their use by raters. Moreover, raters agreed that scoring guides should not only delineate criteria for scoring papers, but should be so constructed as to facilitate (and not impede) speed and accuracy in making scoring decisions. Raters felt that the present guides would have been considerably more useful if, for example, they

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*Detailed descriptions of individual student papers--for each of the four tasks--appear below.

1) had been constructed in *quadrant* form--identifying each quadrant by one point on the four-point scale and listing criteria within it;
2) had enumerated, with less ambiguity and with clearer explanation, the criteria for each point on the scale for each task;
3) had been briefer, listing criteria in an outline format rather than in complete sentences; and
4) had been written wholly in the affirmative, eliminating criteria written in the negative (e.g., "A letter *cannot* earn above a score of '1' if it. . .").

The reminiscence essay (Task IV) was scored holistically, with each paper receiving two independent readings. Again, numerical scores were letter-coded to insure that scoring decisions were arrived at independently. When employing an "orthodox" holistic approach to rating papers, a scoring guide is neither developed nor used. The principles of cooperative holistic scoring dictate that

1) all papers are scored on a *comparative* basis;
2) each piece of writing is compared with all other pieces of writing produced on that or a similar occasion;
3) readers must "calibrate" themselves to the range of performance or quality at hand; and
4) a paper receives a top score because it is one of the best papers in a particular set of papers (the scoring system being norm-referenced).

A description of the "reading process" for holistic scoring sessions has been extracted from Gertrude Conlan's "How the Essay in the College Board English Composition is Scored" (ETS, 1978) and appears in Appendix B of this report. The process as outlined by Conlan can be easily adapted for use with considerably smaller numbers of readers.

## 2. STUDENT PAPERS

2.1 Responses to Task I. Following are selected sample papers produced in response to Task I (directions appear below). Of the four application forms shown below, three (Papers A, B, and C) received scores of *No*; only one (Paper D) received a *Yes* score. The overwhelming majority of student papers in the present assessment received ratings of *Yes* in response to Task I (see Appendix C for data). However, we have chosen to print three *No* papers for illustrative purposes. These papers exhibit individual flaws--different in either kind or quantity--which resulted in *No* ratings. The scoring guide for Task I shows the criteria used in determining these ratings:

1. Below is a sample application form. It is similar to forms used to get information from people who are applying for a job. Please *print* the information requested.

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SCORING GUIDE

TASK I: Application Form

Samples will be checked "Yes" or "No" in terms of their acceptability based upon the following criteria.

To be checked "Yes," a student must:

Make an entry on every line, even if it is a dash, "None," or "Not Applicable."

Line 1. Enter name correctly on line 1: (Printed/legible script).

Carson Pat D. (Dana)

(Any name may be entered and counted as acceptable if it follows the correct format.)

2. Enter an address on line 2, whether it is a street address, post office box, route number, etc.

3. On line 3 enter the city, state or abbreviation and zip code.

4. On line 4 enter a three-digit area code and a seven-digit telephone number (four-digit telephone number is acceptable).

5. On line 5--Personal Reference--a name other than the one used on line 1 and an occupation must be entered. Two names or one name and an address are not acceptable. A name and a company is acceptable.

6. On line 6 check either Yes or No for both A and B.

A sample will be checked "No" if any of the items listed above are not done.

Any sample which the reader cannot judge based upon the criteria above should be given to the Chief Reader for discussion at the completion of the scoring session.

PAPER: A

Yes ☐
No ☑

1. Below is a sample application form. It is similar to forms used to get information from people who are applying for a job. Please *print* the information requested.

*Do not use your own name.* Use the name Pat Dana Carson. You may either give facts about yourself or make up the information.

1. Carson Pat D.
last name first name middle initial

2. _____
street address

3. Cloudcroft New Mexico 88317
city or town state zip code

4. Telephone: 505 682-2338
area code number

5. Personal reference: _____
name

_____
occupation

6. Are you willing to work:

(A) Part time: ____ Yes ____ No

(B) Overtime: ____ Yes ____ No

Discussion: Paper A received a *No* rating simply because the writer has not filled in approximately half of the information called for. The scoring guide for Task I clearly states that "A sample will be checked *No* if any of the items above are not done."

PAPER: B

Yes ☐
No ☑

I. Below is a sample application form. It is similar to forms used to get information from people who are applying for a job. Please *print* the information requested.

*Do not use your own name.* Use the name Pat Dana Carson. You may either give facts about yourself or make up the information.

1. Carson (last name) Pat (first name) Dana (middle initial)
2. P. O. Box 680 (street address)
3. Cloudcroft (city or town) N. M. (state) 88317 (zip code)
4. Telephone: 505 (area code) 437-2068 (number)
5. Personal reference: _____ (name)

   waitress (occupation)
6. Are you willing to work:
   (A) Part time: ___ Yes ___ No
   (B) Overtime: ✓ Yes ___ No

Discussion: Paper B also received a *No* rating because, although it contains more information than Paper A, the writer has failed to provide a name in Item #5, "personal reference." In addition, the writer has not provided the required Yes/No check called for in Item #6(A).

PAPER: C

Yes ☐
No ☑

1. Below is a sample application form. It is similar to forms used to get information from people who are applying for a job. Please *print* the information requested.

*Do not use your own name.* Use the name Pat Dana Carson. You may either give facts about yourself or make up the information.

1. Carson (last name) Pat (first name) D. (middle initial)
2. Rt. 40 Box 582 South Side Road (street address)
3. Aztec (city or town) NM (state) 87410 (zip code)
4. Telephone: 505 (area code) - 334-1111 (number)
5. Personal reference: Pat D. Carson (name)

   Race Car Driver (occupation)

6. Are you willing to work:

   (A) Part time: X Yes ____ No

   (B) Overtime: X Yes ____ No

Discussion: Though Paper C is an example of a completed application form and, as such, differs from A and B, Item #5 is incorrectly entered. Because the writer has entered the name Pat D. Carson as a "personal reference"--repeating the name entered in line 1 of the application--the entry, according to the scoring guide, is unacceptable. On this basis Paper C was rated *No*.

PAPER: D

Yes ☑
No ☐

I. Below is a sample application form. It is similar to forms used to get information from people who are applying for a job. Please *print* the information requested.

*Do not use your own name.* Use the name Pat Dana Carson. You may either give facts about yourself or make up the information.

1. Carson (last name) Pat (first name) Dana (middle initial)
2. 156 Bolivard Street (street address)
3. Mountainair (city or town) New mexico (state) 87036 (zip code)
4. Telephone: 581 (area code) 136-2897 (number)
5. Personal reference: Hank Cuningham (name)

   Head Research Department (occupation)

6. Are you willing to work:

   (A) Part time: ✓ Yes ____ No

   (B) Overtime: ✓ Yes ____ No

Discussion: Paper D is an example of a completed application form. All blanks are either filled in or appropriately checked; all entries are correct (i.e., acceptable according to the scoring guide). This paper was rated *Yes*.

2.2 Responses to Task II. Following are selected sample papers produced in response to Task II. Papers in each score category are followed by discussions of student responses and the ratings they received. The directions to students for Task II are printed below:

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The scoring guide for Task II shows the criteria used in determining ratings:

SCORING GUIDE

Task II: Business Letter

A score of "4" will be awarded to a letter that:

- addresses the task and contains all the necessary components of a business letter
- contains virtually no problems in structure, spelling, punctuation, grammar, diction, etc.
- provides details specifying the writer's training, experience, and qualifications pertinent to the position
- expresses the writer's interest in the position and uses an appropriate tone.

A score of "3" will be awarded to a letter that:

- addresses the task
- contains few errors in structure, spelling, punctuation, grammar, diction, etc., but none so serious as to detract significantly from the message
- provides a few details related to the writer's training, experience, and qualifications for the position.
- A score of "3" may also signify:

  a) a tone that is somewhat inappropriate; e.g., discourteous, arrogant, defensive, flippant, abrasive, or that otherwise may have an adverse effect upon the reader;

  b) a letter which, while correct and informative, is nevertheless bland (lacking enthusiasm); that is, presents nothing that influences the tone of the letter positively or negatively.

A score of "2" is reserved for a letter that, while addressing the task assigned and containing all the necessary components of a business letter,

- contains serious and/or frequent problems in structure, spelling, punctuation, grammar, diction, etc.
- contains few or no personal facts that might interest an employer in seeking the letter writer as an employee.

A letter cannot earn above a score of "1" if it:

- does not address the tasks assigned; e.g., if it requests information on jobs other than those listed
- omits one or more of the necessary components of a business letter.

NOTE: Please give to the Chief Reader those papers that are blank or that are clearly not responsive to the assignment; e.g., that address the reader concerning the usefulness of the assessment.

Score Category Four:

Reader Number: 10 / 24

STUDENT CODE: 2B752

PAPER: A

291 Westover Street
Tyland, CA 99499
April 23, 1980

Tyland Training Center
Box 335
Tyland, CA 99499

Dear Sir:

I would like to apply for the summer employment offered in the April 20 edition of the Golden News. I am interested in being an apprentice in Medical Services.

I will graduate from Tyland High School in May and am going to college next fall. I have taken lifesaving courses and also a CPR class. My interest is nursing and I feel this opportunity would be perfect for me.

I can be reached at 898-0218. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,
Pat Carson

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Reader Number: 3 / 1

STUDENT CODE: 33709

PAPER: B

291 Westover Street
Tyland, California
April 23, 1980

Tyland Training Center
Box 335
Tyland, CA 99499

Dear Gentlemen:

I am writing in response to an ad in the Golden News concerning positions for apprentices in Medical Services. I think I am well qualified for this job. For example, I worked as a volunteer rescue squad technician for two years.

I would like to discuss this matter further. I can be reached at this number after 5 PM 897-4398

Sincerely yours,
[redacted] Pat Carson
Pat Carson

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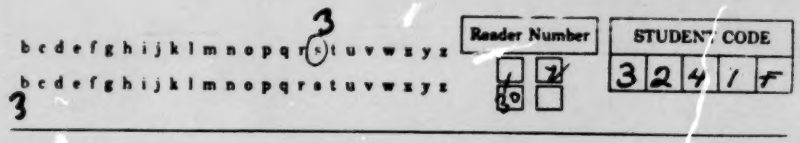
Discussion: Papers A and B received ratings of "4." Each of these responses clearly addresses the task and contains all of the necessary components of a standard business letter (i.e., return address, inside address, date, salutation, closing, signature). Both sample letters are free of surface errors and evidence no problems in organization, syntax, or diction. One minor spelling error, "live saving," occurs in letter A which does not detract from the communication.

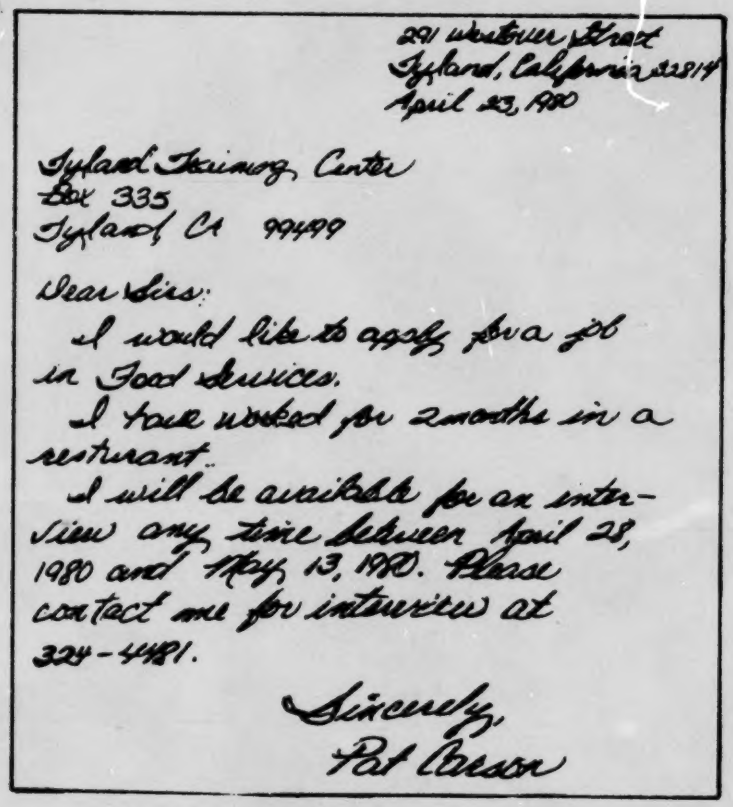
Though neither letter is perfect or exemplary, each of these letters expresses concisely and coherently the writer's interest in the position applied for and each exhibits a serious, enthusiastic, business-like tone appropriate to the designated task. In addition, both writers have offered some details relevant to their backgrounds. Note that the writer of letter A provides us with these pertinent facts: "I will graduate from Tyland High School in May and am going to college next fall. I have taken live [*sic*] saving courses and a CPR class." And the writer of B submits in support of his/her application: "I worked as a volunteer rescue squad technician for two years."

It should be pointed out that neither letter is excessively long and that the scoring guide does not mention length as part of the criteria for ratings on the scale.

Score Category Three:




PAPER: C



291 Westview Street
Tyland, California 92814
April 23, 1980

Tyland Training Center
Box 335
Tyland CA 99499

Dear Sirs:

I would like to apply for a job in food services.

I have worked for 2 months in a restaurant.

I will be available for an interview any time between April 28, 1980 and May 13, 1980. Please contact me for interview at 324-4481.

Sincerely,
Pat Carson

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Reader Number: 1 2 4 0

STUDENT CODE: 7 7 7 7 R

PAPER: D

Pat Carson
291 Westover Street
Tyland, California

Tyland Training Center
Box 335
Tyland, CA 99499

Dear Sirs:

I am applying for the work-training program in Library Services. I worked in my school library and I am very interested in this feild of work.

Sincerly yours,

Pat Carson

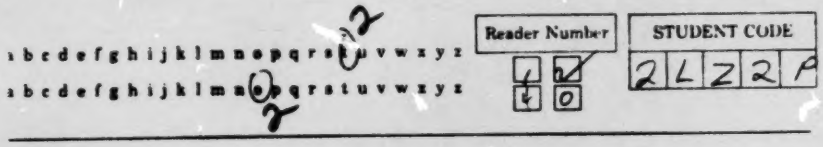
Pat Carson

Discussion: Sample C and Sample D were each rated "3." Both papers address the designated task; both are competently written business letters containing all required components. In contrast to those samples rated as "4," C and D are less complete. Neither C nor D, for example, mentions the ad in the *Golden News* to which they are responding. Though letters C and D are relatively free of surface errors, each contains a spelling error ("resturant," "feild") of negligible significance.

While Sample D expresses the writer's interest in the position and is organized and coherent, it is limited with respect to background detail and general content. This limitation is underscored, perhaps by the bland tone of the letter. Though the writer explains that ". . .I am very interested in this feild [*sic*] of work. . .," the statement fails to convince the reader because of its apparent lack of enthusiasm and obvious lack of support. Sample C supplies appreciably more information than D with regard to such things as experience and availability; thus its tone strikes a more personal and sincere note. The writer of sample C, however, evidences problems in paragraphing, introducing his/her letter with two single-sentence paragraphs which should have been merged to eliminate their choppy quality and so further enhance the flow of communication.

Papers C and D, as well as those others which received ratings of "3," are examples of competently written business letters--clear, coherent, organized, relatively free of surface errors, and displaying virtually no problems in syntax, grammar, or diction.

Score Category Two:




PAPER: E

Pat Carson
291 WesTover ST.
Tyland, California
April 23, 1980

Tyland Training Center
Box 335
Tyland, Ca 999499

Dear Sir,

I learned of the position I am applying for threw an ad in the Golden News. I wish To apply for an apprentices position in the food services, I have experance in this line of work and my Hours are flexable. I would like To request an interview at your convenience.

Sincerely
Pat Carson

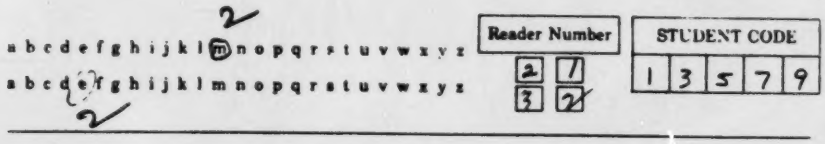
Discussion: Paper E is an example of a letter rated "2." This letter, while addressing the designated task and containing all necessary components of a standard business letter,* provides the reader with few facts or

*Prior to scoring, raters agreed that either the colon or the comma would be considered "acceptable" punctuation in the salutation.

details with respect to background, training, or experience. The writer simply explains that he/she has "experance [*sic*] in this line of work and my hours are flexable [*sic*]." But, what seems of greater urgency here and in other papers rated "2" are the extensive surface errors (e.g., in spelling and mechanics) which seriously detract from the overall "readability" of a paper when coupled with other problems in organization, structure, syntax, and usage.

Note, for example, the repetition, in the first two sentences, of such phrases as "the position I am applying for" and "to apply for an apprentices position"--phrases which reflect the general lack of organization of the whole. This kind of repetition, or circularity, has deflected the writer from providing us with necessary background information. Subverting the communication even further, the writer runs together three disparate thoughts--desire to apply, evidence (?) of experience, and future work hours. The writer also neglects to insert an apostrophe in "apprentices position" and inserts an unnecessary definite article ("*the* food services").

In summary, extensive surface errors and substantial problems in organization, structure, and usage work in combination to impede the "readability" of Paper E and to reduce the rating it received to "2."



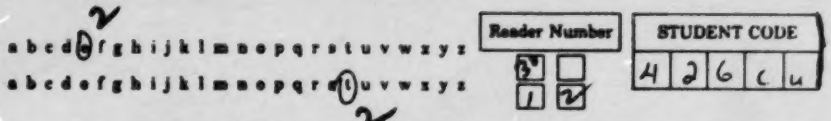

II. PAPER: F

291 westover street
Tyland, California
4-22-1980

Tyland Training Center
Box 335
Tyland, Cal. 99499

Dear Sir:
I would like to know more about medical services of your Summer Employment and I have some experiens to go with.

Thank you,
Pat Carson
Pat Carson




PAPER: G

II.

[redacted]

April, 23, 1980

Summer employment
Earn & learn
Tyland training center
Box 335, CA 99499

Dat Carson
291 westoven street
tyland California

DEAR SIR, I'm answering your Advertisement for your summer employment. I would like too know if I could make a apointment with you, for the medical services.

Iv been taking medical school for 3 years, and have past all my exams, and I would [redacted] like too see if I could learn more from your program.

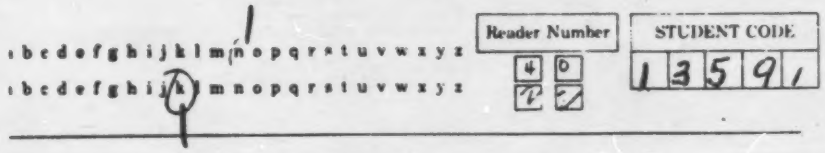
Thank you
Pat Carson

Discussion: Two additional sample papers (F and G) were rated "2." Both papers address the designated task and both contain the necessary components of a standard business letter. Paper F, however, fails to provide the reader with any pertinent personal details and is, in fact, much too brief to do so. The writer has submitted a single run-on sentence in response to the assignment and the syntax is sufficiently garbled as to make the writer's request inaccurate ("I would like to know more about the medical services. . ." which he/she implies are provided). Paper F is also incoherent and incomplete: ". . .and I have some experinces [*sic*] to go with."

Paper G provides some background detail ("I'v [*sic*] been taking medical school for three years and have past all my exams. . ."), but it is marred by a plethora of spelling and usage errors: "I would like *too* know," "*too* see," "*a apointment*," "have *past* all my exams." Paper G contains numerous mechanical inaccuracies, such as the insertion of the unnecessary comma in sentence #2, as well as structural or syntactic problems reflecting confused thought.

Each of these papers, in short, contains sufficient numbers of surface errors and problems in organization, structure, syntax, or usage which, when appearing together, seriously detract from the effectiveness, clarity, and accuracy of the communication.

Score Category One:




II.

Tyland Training Center
Box 335
Tyland C A. 99499

Dear Sir.

I am interested in the EARN and LEARN job. Iye been working at a fast food place but it dont seam to be paying me enough money.

Jukio
Gomez

a b c d e f g h i (k) l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
a b c d e f g h i (k) l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

| Reader Number | STUDENT CODE |
|---|---|
| 2 2 / 3 2 | 6 0 8 K m |

PAPER: I

April 23, 1980

Tyling Training Center
Box 335
Tyyland, CA 99499

Dear Sir:

My name is Pat Carson and I am writing to enquire about your work-training program the position that I'm interested in is medical services I do not have experience in this line of work but would like to try for only Volunteering.

Thank you
Sincerly Yours
Pat Carson

Discussion: Papers H and I are examples of letters which received ratings of "1." Both of these letters address the designated task, but neither contains all of the necessary components of the standard business letter. Paper H has omitted the return address, the date, and the closing; Paper I has failed to include the return address. And since the scoring guide indicates that "a letter cannot earn above a score of '1' if it omits one or more of the necessary components of a business letter," each of these letters has been accurately rated "1."

Beyond the question of business letter format, it should be pointed out that neither of these letters provides the reader with either basic facts or details relevant to the writer's background. Moreover, both papers contain gross deficiencies in such areas as syntax, usage, grammar and diction which, when coupled with numerous surface errors in punctuation, capitalization and spelling, seriously detract from the intended communication. Note the following in Paper H: 1) the substitution of a comma for an apostrophe in the word "I,ve" at the beginning of sentence 2; and 2) the solecism later in the same sentence--". . .it *don't* seem to be paying me enough money." In addition, note the various capitalization inconsistencies in Paper I, as well as the punctuation errors made throughout which are accentuated by faulty syntax such as ". . .but would like to try for only volunteering."

2.3 Responses to Task III. Following are selected sample papers produced in response to Task III. Papers in each "score category" are followed by brief discussions of student responses and the ratings they received. The directions to students for Task III appear below:

MATERIAL REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

Rating announcements proved to be an easy, straightforward job as these papers were rated in strict accordance with the scoring guide. The scoring guide for this task leaves very little room for reader interpretation.

SCORING GUIDE

TASK III: Announcement (Abbreviated Messages)

A sample to be rated a "4" must contain all the necessary information:

- The target of the message (volunteers working on the Sampson apartment)
- Where to meet (Youth Center)
- When to meet (Saturday morning, 8:30)

In addition a "4" sample should reflect embellishment and so contain two or more of the following:

- Mention that lunch will be provided
- An expression of appreciation
- An attention-getting device
- Any effort beyond the minimum required

A sample to be rated a "3" must contain all the necessary information:

- The target of the message
- Where to meet
- When to meet (both day and time)

A "3" sample would not contain additional information as noted in a "4" sample.

A sample to be rated "2" addresses the assignment but omits one of the following pieces of necessary information:

- The target of the message
- Where to meet
- When to meet (both day and time)

A sample to be rated a "1":

- Will not address the assignment, or
- Will omit two or more pieces of information necessary to convey the message.

Not addressing the assignment includes repeating the information in a form other than that appropriate for an announcement (for an abbreviated message).

NOTE: Spelling deviations will be accepted provided such deviations do not impede the communication.

It should be emphasized that spelling deviations were accepted--provided such deviations did not impede the communication--because readers recognized that such variant spellings might be attributed to use in advertising copy and/or on road signs. Samples which received higher scores were announcements written as announcements in abbreviated form.

Score Category Four:

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Reader Number

STUDENT CODE
D I R I E

PAPER: A

III.

4+

Volunteers Wanted
to help fix Sampson's
burned apartment
Meet at Youth Center, 8:30 am
on Saturday

Free Lunch*

Provided by Youth Center

* for all those who help work

31

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Reader Number

STUDENT CODE

S P A M S

PAPER: B

III.

ATTENTION: TO ALL WHO HAVE VOLUNTEERED TO HELP FIX UP THE SAMPSONS' APARTMENT

REPORT TO THE YOUTH CENTER AT EIGHT THIRTY (8:30 A.M.) SATURDAY MORNING

LUNCH WILL BE PROVIDED!!!!

Discussion: Papers A and B (above) were rated "4." Both of these sample announcements contain *all* of the necessary information (i.e., target of the message, where to meet, when to meet) and are nicely embellished by the incorporation of attention-getting devices--the arrows and large format letters in Paper A, the word "ATTENTION" and block letters in Paper B. Each of these announcements clearly reflects an effort beyond the minimum required.

Score Category Three:

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

| Reader Number | STUDENT CODE |
|---|---|
| 3 | C C W-D B |

PAPER: C

III. Volunteers, come to Youth Center 8:30 AM Saturday. Don't bring lunch it will be served burned at Sampsons Apartment

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

| Reader Number | STUDENT CODE |
|---|---|
| 3 | 1 5 2 3 2 |

PAPER: D

III. All Volunteers on the Sampsons' apartment should come to the Youth Center at 8.30 Saturday morning. Lunch will be provided.

Discussion: Both papers (C and D) printed above received "3" ratings. These two announcements contain all of the necessary information (target of message, where and when to meet); they have excluded the additional information, embellishment, or attention-getting device characteristic of "4" papers. Announcements which were *not* "embellished" and which clearly did *not* reflect the effort to go beyond the minimum required were considered competently written assignments and rated "3".

Score Category Two:

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Reader Number

STUDENT CODE A C O D C

PAPER: E

2

III.

LUNCH IN

PEOPle fixing
SAMPSON Apartment
Don't bring lunch
8:30
Saturday Morning

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Reader Number

STUDENT CODE X 5 B 1 17

PAPER: F

III. All the volunteers who are helping fix up the Sampsons apartment should meet at the Youth Center at 8:30. Lunch will be provided by the Youth Center.

Discussion: Samples rated "2" address the designated task; however, these samples omit one of the pieces of necessary information--the target of the message, the meeting place, or the meeting day and time. The writer of Sample E has failed to mention the meeting place, the Youth Center, and the writer of F has failed to include the meeting day, Saturday morning. Each of these announcements--exclusively because of the omission of a piece of necessary information--has received a rating of "2." Notice, though, that while the writer of Sample E has attempted to go beyond the required minimum--by incorporating an attention-getting device in his/her message, the writer of Sample F has not.

Score Category One:

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Reader Number | 1 |

STUDENT CODE: T R O S S

PAPER: G

III. NOTICE

ALL volunteers willing to help fix up the Sampsons' apartment. Contack Vera Stone. The Center will provide lunch.

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Reader Number | 1 |

STUDENT CODE: W H I P P

PAPER: H

III. To whom it May Concern.

Mrs. Stone would like all of the volunteers to fix up the Simpson's appartment.

If you want to volutee your services contract Mrs Stone at 301 East B Street.

The Youth Center will provide lunch for all volunteers.

Thank you.
Pat Carson.

Discussion: According to the scoring guide, papers rated "1" have either failed to address the assignment or have omitted two or more pieces of information necessary to convey the message. Papers G and H received ratings of "1." The writer of Paper G has omitted two pieces of information--the meeting place and the meeting day and time. In addition, this announcement instructs volunteers to contact Vera Stone which, according to the telephone conversation, is simply erroneous information.

Paper H, on the other hand, was rated "1" on several counts, including the following: 1) The writer has failed to announce the meeting place and the meeting day and time; 2) the announcement contains erroneous and misleading information--"If you want to volunteer your services contact Mrs. Stone at 301 Fast B Street."; and 3) the writer has not conveyed the required information in an abbreviated format appropriate to an announcement or notice.

2.4 Responses to Task IV. Selected sample papers produced in response to Task IV (the reminiscence essay) follow. Papers in each "score category" are followed by a brief discussion of the student's response and the rating it received. The directions to students for Task IV are printed below:

MATERIAL REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

In addition to having reproduced the original student paper, for the purposes of this document each essay was typewritten to facilitate reading and analysis. As these essays were scored holistically, a scoring guide, it should be reiterated, was not used in rating responses to Task IV. Nevertheless, in discussing ratings, areas which proved relevant to making *holistic* judgments included the following:

- Content
- Organization (e.g., paragraphing)
- Sentence structure
  - syntactic patterning
  - sentence length
- Grammar (e.g., NP + VP Agreement)
- Surface errors (e.g., spelling, mechanics)
- Degree of closure, completeness
- Exemplification, support, detail
- General "communicability" and coherence

The 1 to 4 scoring system employed for the holistic evaluation of these essays should be thought of as a continuum of "best" papers, 4's, to those "least good," 1's. It must be remembered, too, that in holistic evaluation there is no such thing as *the top paper*. So long as they exhibit a certain level of quality, papers of many sorts can receive a score of "4." Papers which received *high* scores generally

- showed clear understanding and execution of the assignment, as well as a direct approach to the assignment
- demonstrated a clear focus--content/ideas were generated well and ideas were well supported with examples, facts, details
- exhibited appropriate organization (organizational structure and patterns)
- were marked by a sense of closure and completeness
- were relatively free of surface errors, but might have been flawed to some extent
- revealed a certain sense of style (to a greater extent than those scored lower)
- demonstrated variety of sentence length and syntactic patterning.

Papers which received *mid-range* scores generally

- were competent, but somewhat inconsistent in attention to, and demonstration of, those qualities which "best" papers exhibited
- were somewhat less clearly focused, used less exemplification, less support, fewer facts or details
- proved less well organized and lacked, in many instances, a clear beginning, middle, and/or end
- exhibited surface errors more frequently--in spelling and mechanics
- demonstrated no real sense of closure or completeness
- lacked the level of linguistic (stylistic) sophistication demonstrated in papers marked above them
- showed some variety of sentence length and syntactic patterning; but it became significant (with this group of papers) that syntactic or grammatical problems often surfaced when the writer attempted to break away from the familiar NP + VP pattern

- were marked by other problems in organization such as paragraphing, logical development, or clarity of thought.

Papers which received *low* scores generally

- demonstrated a lack of clear understanding of the task; were marked by poor execution of the task, as well as little awareness of the limits of the task
- lacked a clear focus, submitted few facts or details, and provided little or no exemplification
- exhibited poor organizational design with no clear beginning, middle, or end
- demonstrated little or no sense of closure or completeness; often gave the impression that the writer left the essay unfinished
- contained many more surface errors than papers ranked higher; while spelling and mechanics were not deciding factors so far as scoring was concerned, low ranked papers exhibited spelling and mechanical problems which tended to detract from and impede the communication
- were marked by greater numbers of simple sentences; when attempts were made to deviate from NP + VP structures, serious syntactic problems surfaced as evidenced by an increase in the number of run-on sentences and/or sentence fragments
- exhibited other, sometimes severe, problems in organization, logical development, or clarity of thought and expression which resulted in the generation of incomplete, paragraph-essays
- evidenced a lack of mastery of the conventions of standard written English.

Score Category Four:

PAPER A

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Reader Number

STUDENT CODE P I N Y H R

IV

Remembering

Everyone, at one time or another, likes to sit down and think about "the good old days." Im no exception. When I think about the days I spent in elementary school, one person always comes to my mind.

His name is Mr. Webb. He was my fifth grade teacher. I remember him as a short man who wore glasses. That was one thing we had in common because I wore glasses, too. Anyway, we always got along really well. I guess you could say I was his "pet". If he needed something done, I would do it for him. If I needed something done, he'd do it. We had more of a friendship than a student teacher relationship.

Well, a few years have passed now, but I've only seen him once. I guess I've changed a lot because he didn't recognize me. I sure recognized him though. He seems a little shorter than he used to. I wonder why that is? He still wears those same glasses and he's still the sweetest teacher.

REMEMBERING

Everyone, at one time or another, likes to sit down and think about "the good old days." I'm no exception. When I think about the days I spent in elementary school, one person always comes to my mind.

His name is Mr. Webb. He was my fifth grade teacher. I remember him as a short man who wore glasses. That was one thing we had in common because I wore glasses, too. Anyway, we always got along really well. I guess you could say I was his "pet". If he needed something done, I would do it for him. If I needed something done, he'd do it. We had more of a friendship than a student teacher relationship.

Well, a few years have passed now, but I've only seen him once. I guess I've changed a lot because he didn't recognize me. I sure recognized him though. He seems a little shorter than he used to. I wonder why that is? He still wears those same glasses and he's still the sweetest teacher.

Discussion: Paper A ("Remembering") received a "4" rating from each of two raters reading independently. "Remembering" is a well-organized, three-paragraph essay with distinct beginning, middle, and end.

Although the writer begins the essay by resorting to a cliché ("the good old days") in his/her "thesis" statement, the effect of this device is positive. The brief introductory paragraph manages to reflect a sense of "audience," immediately and directly appealing to the reader ("Everyone, at one time or another, likes to sit down and think about 'the good old days.' I'm no exception."). The paragraph, too, exhibits a clear understanding of both the task and its limits without needless elaboration.

Focusing on Mr. Webb--"my fifth grade teacher"--the writer provides relevant facts about the teacher under discussion (the glasses, his height) as well as appropriate details concerning his/her relationship to Mr. Webb ("I was his 'pet'"; "I wore glasses, too.")

The paper is not only free of surface errors in spelling and mechanics, but it is free of deeper problems of either a grammatical or syntactic nature. The writer has demonstrated an especially good sense of the use of the comma in denoting pauses and in punctuating dependent clauses. Because the writer has manipulated sentence length, and because there is considerable variation in syntactic patterning, the paper flows smoothly, retains a degree of freshness, and communicates well without resorting to the short, choppy sentences and the repetitive NP + VP format characteristic of student writers with less linguistic sophistication. The sense of smoothness and directness which this paper displays is further enhanced by the writer's effective use of the "if" clause and by the incorporation of simple transition words like "anyway" and "well."

"Remembering" seems to make a complete and coherent statement and generates a sense of closure in the reader without being unnecessarily long.

Score Category Three:

PAPER: B

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

| Reader Number | STUDENT CODE |
|---|---|
| 2 P<br>3 1 | K 2 4 9 R |

IV I remember my second grade teacher, Mrs. Scamp at Center Elementary school. She was really old and walked slouched over. At times she could be really sweet, and other times she was really mean.

One time I remember this boy that was in my class, he was a real class clown. Anyways one day he was walking around this classroom making trouble, and Mrs. Scamp took a rope that she kep in her coat closet, and sat him down in his desk, and tied him in. Then she propted herself on top of his desk so that he wouldn't untie the rope.

Then she used to walk around the classroom singing like she was in an Opera. And onetime she did a little jig as she got to her char to sit down.

I remember my second grade teacher, Mrs. Scamp, at Center Elementary School. She was really old and walked slouched over. At times she could be really sweet, and other times she was really mean.

One time I remember this boy that was in my class, he was a real class clown. Anyways one day he was walking around this classroom making trouble, and Mrs. Scamp took a rope that she kep in her coat closet, and sat him down in his desk, and tied him in. Then she propted herself on top of his desk so that he wouldn't untie the rope.

Then she used to walk around the classroom singing like she was in an opera. And onetime she did a little jig as she got to her chair to sit down.

Discussion: Paper B ("I Remember My Second Grade Teacher") was rated "3" by each of two raters reading independently. This paper is brief, direct, and well executed and demonstrates a clear understanding of the assigned task. But Paper B is somewhat less well organized and less well focused than those papers rated "4."

While Paper B is marked by a concise introductory paragraph and amplified with some detail or support in its middle section, the paper's final paragraph fails to provide the reader with a sense of closure. The portrait of the teacher, Mrs. Scamp, appears a bit disjointed, the various strands of her character never adequately brought together. The writer's chatty style, though, succeeds in capturing the attention of the reader and the two refreshing, final images

> ". . .she used to walk around the classroom singing like she was in an opera."
>
> ". . .onetime [*sic*] she did a little jig as she got to her chair to sit down."

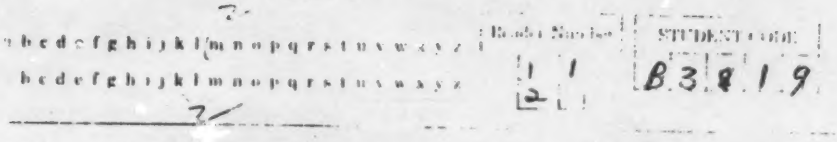
manage to convey a vivid impression of this teacher.

"I Remember My Second Grade Teacher" is relatively free of surface errors. Two spelling errors which are in evidence--"kep" and "propted"--do not seriously detract from, or impede, the communication. The paper exhibits some variation in sentence length and syntactic patterning, but, in that variation, demonstrates certain syntactic problems. A few run-on sentences (the first two sentences in paragraph two) constitute syntactic "lapses" which can be attributed to larger issues such as problems in the sequencing or logical deve'opment of ideas and a lack of precision or clarity in thought.

These few problems notwithstanding, Paper B manages to be concise, direct, reasonably clear and coherent; it is organized but focuses less well on its primary subject than those papers which received ratings of "4."

Score Category Two:

PAPER: C




IV

Miss Sally Bastian was one of the best teachers I'd ever had. Why she was because she was kind. She hardly ever gut mad at her students. She didn't need to, because everyone always tried to get a long with her. If we made good grades in her class she would give us treats. Once she took us to a museum. I've never seen her really upset. at anyone. She's was a very nice teacher.

Miss Sally Bastian was one of the best teachers I'd ever had. Why she was because she was kind. She hardly every gut mad at her students. She didn't need to, because everyone always tried to get a long with her. If we made good grades in her class she would give us treats. Once she took us to a museum. I've never seen her really upset. at anyone. She's was a very nice teacher.

Discussion: Paper C ("Miss Bastian") exhibits many of the kinds of errors appearing in Paper B which received a "3" rating. But the errors in the case of Paper C, which resulted in a rating of "2," tend to be more destructive to the overall communication. There are more errors of both surface and deeper varieties and these are considerably more serious in nature--detracting from such things as the organization and focus of the communication.

The paper is marred by a string of platitudes ("Miss Sally Bastian was one of the best teachers I'd ever had." ". . .She's [*sic*] was a very nice teacher.") which, when coupled with a lack of real, concrete detail or exemplification, tends to detract from the overall effect of the communication on the reader. This paper lacks a clear focus in that content and ideas are not supported by examples, facts, or details. In addition, few of this writer's sentences seem to relate logically to

previous sentences, thus further impairing content and subverting any sense of organizational design. The writer's ideas and thoughts seem to drift one into another creating an amorphous impression on the reader rather than producing the desired organized, patterned whole reflected in Papers A and B. Moreover, the organizational problems from which this paper suffers can be attributed to the single-paragraph nature of the communication. The paper manifests no clearly delineated beginning, middle, or end; and what appears to be the writer's conclusion is simply an example of the circularity of the writer's "reasoning." In addition, Paper C lacks any sense of closure or completeness owing, in part, to problems with paragraphing, length, logical development, and circularity of argument.

The writer's sentences show some variation in length and structure, but contain both syntactic and grammatical snarls. For example: the writer has substituted "I'd" for I've in the first sentence; the second sentence is marred by irregular syntax and appears to be missing a verb; the penultimate "sentence" is a fragment; and the last reflects an uncertainty about tense or subject-verb agreement. While many of this writer's sentences are basic NP + VP structures, a majority of these exhibit either grammatical or syntactic anomalies.

Although surface errors do not dominate this single-paragraph "essay" and do not impede the intended communication ("gut" does appear for got, "a long" for *along*, but *museum* is spelled correctly), the writer seems to be unaware, for example, of the appropriate uses of the comma (as in sentence #4). The inability of this writer to deploy the comma effectively throughout the paper evidently limits his/her potential for generating, expanding, and complementing thought.

Score Category One:

**PAPER: D**

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Reader Number

STUDENT CODE

IV. Miss. Brunner because she was always telling somebody to sit down or was calling them smarty pans if she would keep talking. She was not such a bad teacher. But she looked so mean when she would look at somebody. there were times when she paddled me but I just laeght a little there where very little times when we did something fun. she was a teacher that no one could forget. Some times we would call her old lady Brumer because she was old.



44

Miss. Brunner because she was always telling somebody to sit down or was calling thes smarty pans if he would keep taulking. She was not such a bad teacher. But she looked so mean when she would look at somebody. There were times when she padeled me but I just laeghft a little there were very little times when we did something fun. she was a teacher that no one could forget. Some times we would call her old lady Brunner because she was old.

Discussion: Paper D ("Miss Brunner") demonstrates little evidence of organizational pattern. The paper seems to be all middle, with no clear beginning or end. As in the case of Paper C, "Miss Brunner" is a single-paragraph "essay" which lacks a central idea or focus. The introductory sentence appears to be a failed attempt at a unifying statement which, in its run-on form and syntactic discord, serves only to confuse the reader.

The paper lacks any sense of closure or completeness; it appears unfinished and leaves the reader with the impression that the writer "jumped ship in mid-stream." Paper D is an amorphous construction presenting very little concrete information about its subject, Miss Brunner.

Much like the previous paper, this paper has a circularity about it and a sense of repetitiveness ("Some times [*sic*] we would call her old lady Brunner because she was old."). Ideas are presented which fail to enrich the communication because they simply do not expand thoughts or explore propositions put forward about the teacher. The writer has provided us with only skeletal background detail and exemplification and so is unable to attain any depth in the exploration of the subject. Consequently, what does appear about Miss Brunner is disjointed, fragmented, and incomplete; words like "mean" and "old," phrases like "bad teacher" and "no one could forget" appear abstract and lifeless without explanatory support or additional details.

In addition to what it lacks in the areas of organization, content, focus, and logical development, Paper D demonstrates other significant problems of both a syntactic and grammatical nature. The writer's syntax seems to degenerate whenever the thought pattern attempts to assume a more complex arrangement than the basic NP + VP form. Throughout Paper D, jumbled thought appears in combination with syntactic breakdown. Both the introductory sentence and the fourth sentence are run-on and reflect confusing and muddled thought. These two sentences suggest that the writer seemed to be full of thoughts, ideas, or reflections, but simply could not present them in straightforward, clear, discursive prose. The writer's thoughts simply run together (they evidently could not be sorted out) resulting in an awkward, tortuous syntax couched in run-on form.

The simple sentences of NP + VP variety (#2, #3, and #5), however, do manage to communicate the writer's thought in clear--if abbreviated and unadorned--terms (e.g., "She was not such a bad teacher." or "But she looked so mean when she would look at somebody.").

Grammatical and usage irregularities also abound in Paper D. Sentences #1 and #4 display deeper structural problems. In the latter sentence, for example, the construction "very little times" is used in place of the more acceptable "very few times"; in the former the writer employs a rather lengthy and relatively incoherent clausal structure, ". . .because she was always telling somebody to sit down or was calling thes smarty pans if he would keep taulking." Of course, sentence #1 displays an array of surface errors as well as problems in agreement and pronoun reference choice. Surface errors, however, do not seriously detract from, or impede, the communication in and of themselves; but, when these kinds of errors are embedded in sentences with deeper structural (syntactic and grammatical) irregularities, the intent and clarity of the communication is seriously subverted.

It is interesting to note, too, that the writer of this paper does not employ a single *comma* which, as in the case of Paper C, very definitely militates against the clear presentation of more complex ideas and so hampers this writer's potential for generating, complementing, exploring, or expanding thought.

Paper D was rated "1" by each of two raters reading independently. This paper clearly demonstrates that the writer lacks a mastery of the conventions of standard written English.

## 3. MAKING PASS/FAIL DECISIONS

After having evaluated student papers in a particular sample--such as the 1,000 student sample given the Basic Skills Assessment Writing Sample test--and after having assigned numerical ratings to all tasks, evaluators must then determine the levels of performance that constitute passing and failing. In order to do this, the following kinds of questions must be considered:

1) In the context of a minimum competency examination, where should the cut-off point be drawn to designate passing papers?

2) How is such a cut-off point arrived at?

3) What criteria are used in making pass/fail determinations?

Answers to these questions will be presented and discussed in a forthcoming SDE document. Such a discussion should constitute guidelines for those teachers and administrators who must make pass/fail decisions after scoring groups of student papers for the Writing Appraisal portion of the New Mexico High School Proficiency Examination.

## 4. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

Based upon the preceding analyses of student writing generated by the four sample tasks, what general observations can be made for improving the composition skills of students at the program and classroom levels?

4.1 The Program Level. Improvement of the composition skills of students should *not* be viewed exclusively in terms of a competency or proficiency examination--such as the Writing Appraisal portion of the New Mexico High School Proficiency Examination. The development of the appropriate composition skills necessary for a student to perform satisfactorily on the various tasks of a writing proficiency examination should be viewed in the context of a total writing program--a program committed to developing syntactic fluency specifically and to improving the written communication skills of students in the widest sense.

A National Council of Teachers of English select committee of teachers, supervisors, and writing specialists has developed "Standards For Basic Skills Writing Programs" (March 1979) for use by state and local education agencies in establishing comprehensive writing skills instructional programs. NCTE urges the close examination of these standards as a means for ensuring that program planners "attend not only to effective practice within the classroom but also to the environment of support for writing instruction throughout the school and community." Given the increasing concern for the "quality of writing" in the larger society, NCTE "Standards For Basic Writing Programs" underscores the importance of taking "the most effective approaches to quality in school writing programs."

Because program planners "must begin with an adequate conception of what writing is," NCTE submits the following operational definition of writing:

> Writing is the process of selecting, combining, arranging and developing ideas in effective sentences, paragraphs, and, often, longer units of discourse. The process requires the writer to cope with a number of variables: *method of development* (narrating, explaining, describing, reporting and persuading); *tone* (from very personal to quite formal); *form* (from a limerick to a formal letter to a long research report); *purpose* (from discovering and expressing personal feelings and values to conducting the impersonal "business" of everyday life); *possible audiences* (oneself, classmates, a teacher, "the world"). Learning to write and to write increasingly well involves developing increasing skill and sensitivity in selecting from and combining these variables to shape particular messages. It also involves learning to conform to conventions of the printed language, appropriate to the age of the writer and to the form, purpose and tone of the message.
>
> Beyond the pragmatic purpose of shaping messages to others, writing can be a means of self-discovery, of finding out what we believe, know, and cannot find words or circumstances to say to others. Writing can be a deeply personal act of shaping our perception of the world and our relationships to people and things in that world. Thus, writing serves both public and personal needs of students, and it warrants the full, generous and continuing effort of all teachers.

NCTE's "Standards For Basic Skills Writing Programs" is divided into three interrelated areas--teaching and learning, support, and program evaluation; these standards consist in the following:

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

1. There is evidence that knowledge of current theory and research in writing has been sought and applied in developing the writing program.

2. Writing instruction is a substantial and clearly identified part of an integrated English language arts curriculum.

3. Writing is called for in other subject matters across the curriculum.

4. The subject matter of writing has its richest source in the students' personal, social, and academic interests and experiences.

5. Students write in many forms (e.g., essays, notes, summaries, poems, letters, stories, reports, scripts, journals).

6. Students write for a variety of audiences (e.g., self, classmates, the community, the teacher) to learn that approaches vary as audiences vary.

7. Students write for a wide range of purposes (e.g., to inform, to persuade, to express the self, to explore, to clarify thinking).

8. Class time is devoted to all aspects of the writing process: generating ideas, drafting, revising, and editing.

9. All students receive instruction in both (a) developing and expressing ideas and (b) using the conventions of edited American English.

10. Control of the conventions of edited American English (supporting skills such as spelling, handwriting, punctuation, and grammatical usage) is developed primarily during the writing process and secondarily through related exercises.

11. Students receive constructive responses--from the teacher and from others--at various stages in the writing process.

12. Evaluation of individual writing growth:

    (a) is based on complete pieces of writing;

    (b) reflects informed judgments, first, about clarity and content and then about conventions of spelling, mechanics, and usage;

(c) includes regular responses to individual pieces of student writing as well as periodic assessment measuring growth over a period of time.

SUPPORT

13. Teachers with major responsibility for writing instruction receive continuing education reflecting current knowledge about the teaching of writing.

14. Teachers of other subjects receive information and training in ways to make use of and respond to writing in their classes.

15. Parent and community groups are informed about the writing program and about ways in which they can support it.

16. School and class schedules provide sufficient time to assure that the writing process is thoroughly pursued.

17. Teachers and students have access to and make regular use of a wide range of resources (e.g., library services, media, teaching materials, duplicating facilities, supplies) for support of the writing program.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

18. Evaluation of the writing program focuses on pre- and post-program sampling of complete pieces of writing, utilizing a recognized procedure (e.g., ets holistic rating, the Diederich scale, primary trait scoring) to arrive at reliable judgments about the quality of the program.

19. Evaluation of the program might also include assessment of a sample of student attitudes; gathering of pertinent quantitative data (e.g., frequency of student writing, time devoted to writing activities); and observational data (evidence of prewriting activities, class anthologies, writing folders, and student writing displays).

4.2 The Classroom Level. While NCTE's "Standards" delineates those areas which curriculum planners should attend to, study, and incorporate at the program level, many of these standards have direct implications for the classroom teacher.

In the context of a total writing program for developing the written communication skills of students--with or without the constraint of a statewide writing proficiency examination, the teacher must ensure that writing is, in fact, taught on a regular basis. Only through the frequent production of student-generated sentences, paragraphs, and longer units of discourse such as descriptive passages, argumentative essays, business and personal letters, and the like, will the student develop essential written communication skills.

Writing skills are only learned operationally, through the process of generating ideas, drafting, revising, and editing. That is, writing skills--whether for the purposes of certifying minimal competency, expressing the self, or producing business communications or college-level essays--are acquired and refined only by writing. To this end the classroom teacher in the various content areas (e.g., English, science, social studies, business education) must 1) regularly elicit writing from students, 2) offer constructive responses to the writing, and 3) serve as a guide to students from the incipient stages of generating ideas and drafting through the final stages of editing, completing, and sharing written products. Writing instruction must be substantial; such instruction should become an integral part of all "subject matter" taught across the curriculum.*

In terms of the writing samples presented and reviewed in the present document, and beyond those axiomatic principles listed above in the "Teaching and Learning" section of "Standards For Basic Skills Writing Programs," the following observations are offered for improving the composition skills of students at the classroom level:

1) The teacher should initially read and respond to each student's paper for the impression its totality makes. If teachers read each paper received in this holistic manner, then attention to surface errors (e.g., in spelling, mechanics, punctuation) will not become the dominant concern in an initial response. Since developing writers need encouragement, concentration on numerous surface errors and their elimination might very well inhibit a student and so curtail his progress in attempting to generate further discourse.

The elimination of surface errors should be attended to at a later stage in the writing process--during editing--and not during or immediately following the writing of initial drafts. During the drafting stages of the process, the teacher should function to guide individual students through certain of the more complex aspects of writing, such as: developing skill in the organization and presentation of material; refining clarity of thought; sharpening focus; reducing syntactic discord. Sample papers which exhibited problems in these more complex, more crucial, aspects of writing consistently received lower ratings ("1's" and "2's") from readers. Surface errors, it should be underscored, did not prove to have a significant impact on the ratings of sample papers unless 1) these errors alone seriously impeded the intended communication or 2) these errors were coupled with problems in the more complex areas of structure (syntax or grammar), organization, focus, or degree of closure. The presence of surface errors alone might have had an impact in terms of distinguishing the better sample papers from the best or the poorer sample papers from the poorest.

2) Since an overwhelming number of sample papers rated low ("1's" and "2's") displayed a high density of simple sentences containing NP + VP

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*The corollary to this viewpoint suggests that if content area teachers, in addition to English staff members, are continually reading and responding to student writing, then these teachers should also participate in holistic scoring sessions conducted for the purpose of rating writing samples for the Writing Appraisal portion of the NMHSPE.

structures, it became apparent that teachers should concentrate on developing syntactic maturity with students who generate this level of writing. In the present sample, when students who produced low rated papers attempted to deviate from the NP + VP structure, serious syntactic problems surfaced--generally reflecting an increase in the number of run-on sentences and sentence fragments.

One approach to increasing the level of syntactic maturity of these kinds of students--a technique specifically designed to aid writers in generating lengthier clausal units--is that of *sentence combining*. Sentence combining is an instructional technique for improving student writing without the use of formal grammar instruction. Simply stated, the technique requires that students combine numbers of kernel sentences into lengthier, more syntactically complex sentences--sentences which may be integrated into extended pieces of discourse. According to Frank O'Hare, practicing sentence-combining techniques enables composition students to "build sentences" and "manipulate syntax" with increased facility. Students exposed to sentence-combining techniques

> could use these syntactic manipulative skills at the prewriting or rewriting stage in their work in composition. *They would be better able to "unchop" the choppy sentence and eliminate the run-on sentence.* One can readily envisage individual or classwide work on improving sentences or even paragraphs in a rhetorically oriented setting. Students could practice rewriting whole paragraphs, given either in kernel form or in a choppy or overly elaborate style. Experienced in sentence manipulation and trained to think in rhetorical terms, they would be in a better position to make meaningful rhetorical choices because they would have a wider repertoire of syntactic alternatives from which to choose.* [italics added]

For a complete discussion of the technique of sentence combining--its use in the classroom, research findings, sample sentence-combining exercises and strategies--the reader is referred to O'Hare (1973).

3) The programmatic and classroom uses of holistic evaluation, as ETS has asserted, are many and varied: 1) it can be used to promote communication about the teaching of writing among faculty members; 2) it can be used effectively in statewide and other large-scale assessments of writing; 3) it can be used to measure growth in students' writing ability; 4) it enables teachers to score writing assignments quickly and reliably--emphasizing what is right rather than what is wrong with a piece of writing; and 5) it can aid teachers and supervisors in determining what levels of student writing ability would require remediation and, indirectly, what kinds of remediation would be advisable and appropriate to meet the needs of individual students.

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*Frank O'Hare, ***Sentence Combining: Improving Student Writing without Formal Grammar Instruction***, NCTE Research Report No. 15, Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1973, pp. 70-71.

One classroom use of holistic evaluation, however, which has not been sufficiently explored or practiced is that involving teaching composition students to use the holistic approach in evaluating the writing of peers. Teaching secondary school students the theory behind, and the procedures for, holistic evaluation--and providing them with classroom time to practice rating writing samples--would serve to acquaint students with the constituent features of "good" (and "bad") writing. They would quickly learn which pieces of discourse communicated effectively and which did not. In short, through the process of reading writing samples, rating these samples holistically, and discussing their judgments in class with a teacher well versed in composition theory and pedagogy, students would learn to recognize "good writing" when they see it. Moreover, students would then be able to use the knowlege about writing acquired in rating various kinds of samples and in classroom discussions in order to explore their own written products and to "measure" their own writing abilities through self-evaluation.

The acquisition of knowledge *about* writing is certainly no substitute for classroom composing, but engaging in such a pursuit would sharpen students' editing and revision skills. Classroom time spent on the holistic evaluation of the written work of peers would lead to a greater understanding of what specific qualities good pieces of writing share. Once such understanding and its practical correlate, awareness, can be consistently demonstrated, the writing abilities of individual students should reflect real growth.

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APPENDIX A:

BASIC SKILLS ASSESSMENT WRITING SAMPLE TEST

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Name _____

Date of Birth _____ (month) _____ (day) _____ (year)

School _____

Grade _____

Today's Date _____

Teacher's Name _____

| STUDENT CODE |
| --- |
| |
| |
| |
| |
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# Basic Skills Assessment

## Writing Sample

Educational Testing Service

Addison-Wesley Testing Service

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APPENDIX B:

## HOLISTIC SCORING SESSIONS: THE READING PROCESS

The organization of the reading process is a simple one. To maintain the quality and consistency of the reading, individual readers are responsible to an assistant chief reader or a chief reader. These people work together and are responsible for setting and maintaining standards for the reading.* The reading is very definitely a cooperative effort. The chief reader is the person each individual reader should consult when he or she has questions about any paper. Certain essays, such as those that are off the topic, illegible, or obscene, should automatically be given to the chief reader. So should essays that are really poems, short stories, or plays. These are special papers; they are not to be dismissed lightly, but should be scored according to the scoring policy set for them.

Throughout the reading, the reader's work is checked constantly by the chief reader or by an assistant. It is essential to have all papers read the same way. Perfect agreement among large numbers of readers is not possible, but we must act as if it is and work toward achieving it. Everything possible is done to maintain the scoring standards and in such an effort the cooperation of all readers is vital.

The procedures during the reading and the setting of the standards for the reading follow a pattern:

1. The chief reader presents the topic to the readers and attempts to define the writing problem inherent in the topic. He or she answers certain basic questions about the scoring of the papers: How much attention should be paid to misspelling? What is considered off the topic? What do we define as a specific example?

2. The chief reader explains the scoring scale to be used. The four scores range from 4 (the highest) to 1 (the lowest). In a scale which has only four points (4, 3, 2, 1), there is obviously no middle score. One of the major reasons why the scale works as well as it does, is that readers are forced away from a middle, or uncommitted, score. Readers must first decide whether the paper is above average (in the 3-4 category) or below average (in the 1-2 category). After making this first decision, readers must then judge whether the paper is enough above average to rate the highest score (4) or enough below average to rate the lowest score (1). Often some new readers are hesitant about granting any papers a 4.

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*Depending upon the size of the group of readers, which in turn depends upon the number of papers to be read and the amount of time available to read them, a greater number of assistant chief readers should be assigned. With small groups of readers, assistant chief readers are unnecessary. As a general rule, one person should be assigned the leadership and supervisory responsibilities outlined for each group of 5 or 6 readers. During the course of any reading, one chief reader should always be present.

They need not be. Among the thousands of papers produced by candidates throughout the country there are certainly many that are enough above average to receive a 4, just as there will be papers that deserve 3's. Unfortunately, no reader--experienced or inexperienced--seems to need assurance about giving out 2's and 1's; what all readers seem to need from time to time is the reminder that not all the papers are "2" papers or "1" papers. Though the fatigue of reading may make it seem so, not every candidate who writes an essay is below average in writing ability, and the readers must constantly guard against giving scores much lower than the papers deserve. We simply ask readers to bear in mind at all times that some candidates are above average in ability and deserve to be scored as such. Not only should there be above average papers but, because the group is being judged against itself, there must be such papers. The candidate's performance is not being measured against an ideal but against the performance of all other candidates writing an essay on this topic for this particular test.

3. After the discussion of the rating scale and of an ideal distribution of scores, the chief reader presents a series of sample papers. This group of papers has been judged previously by the chief reader and the assistant chief readers as representative of particular categories of competence. There is a good paper, a merely above-average paper, a just below-average paper, a poor paper, and perhaps one or two others. Readers are asked to rank the papers. When the readers have completed that task, the chief reader announces the score that the assistant chief readers and the chief reader have given each paper. It is up to each reader to compare the way he or she ranked the papers with the way they were ranked by experienced readers.

   (All sample papers used to instruct readers are duplicates of essays written by candidates taking the test. Immediately after the administration of the test the chief reader and his or her assistants read hundreds of papers to determine how students have performed *on this test on this topic.* They then select samples representative of the range of quality *as it is found.* They do not score the essays against an ideal standard, but against the standard established by the actual performance of students writing on this particular topic.)

4. The chief reader then distributes to readers another set of sample papers, one at a time. After each reader has scored the sample papers, the chief reader asks for a show of hands from the readers to indicate the scores given to each paper. The scores given by all the readers are tallied and reported to the group. At that point, the chief reader announces the score that the chief reader

and assistant chief readers thought the paper deserved. When there is a great difference between this score and the score the readers have given, the chief reader will explain the reason the experienced group gave that particular score. Those reasons may or may not be accepted by the group of readers. The chief reader does not prescribe the scores; he or she offers guidelines, in the light of experience. It is the consensus of the readers themselves that determines the standards.

Always, during this process, the individual reader is responsible for noting in what category the particular score awarded the paper fell. Is the reader scoring with the majority of the readers? If not, is he or she scoring too high? To low? It is necessary for all readers to adjust to the standards of the majority. There can be no exceptions if all papers are to be scored as nearly as possible in the same way. An individual reader who assumes that he or she has the right to set individual standards is being unfair to the candidates whose papers he or she will read.

As sample papers are read and their scores recorded, some papers will receive from all the readers an almost equal number of, say, 2's and 3's. This division in scoring should alarm no one, for obviously there are papers that are exactly average and would be rated as 2.5 if such a score were possible, just as there are papers that deserve 3.5 or 1.5--other scores that individual readers cannot give. However, the rating system is designed to provide for such scores.

Each paper is read two times and each reader gives that paper a score ranging from 1 to 4. Therefore, when these scores are summed, a paper may receive a score as low as 2 or as high as 8. Because not every paper receives the same score from each reader, a paper may have a final score of 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, or any other score on the scale. If one reader judges a paper as 3 and another as 4, no one is greatly alarmed. We expect such differences occasionally. However, we do not expect readers to give 1's to papers that other readers have scored 4. That large a discrepancy in scoring cannot ordinarily be tolerated. However, very few papers under very special circumstances may seem to deserve such divergent scores.

5. The process of scoring samples, of reporting scores by a show of hands, and of tallying these scores continues until the chief reader is sure that the readers are in close agreement, that they have a clear understanding of the bases for judging papers, and that, insofar as is humanly possible, all papers will be scored in the same way. The chief reader then announces that the actual scoring of the papers is to begin, even though he or an assistant may continue to work individually with a few readers who are still not scoring with the group. In order to ensure reliable results, these readers' scores must, of course, be brought into line with those of the other readers.

6. From time to time throughout the reading, readers will be given other sample papers to read and score. This continuous reading of samples, as well as the numerous rest periods, helps readers keep to the standards they have set. After all, when readers have read a few hundred essays on the same topic, their fatigue naturally causes them to feel that subsequent papers lack a certain freshness. Scores do tend to drop after the first two days of the reading. Educational Testing Service does all that it can to see that this very human reaction does not result in unfairness to individual candidates. For example, the papers are distributed among readers in a way that ensures that each paper will have its first scoring during those first two days. During the reading the readers and the chief reader must also do what they can to see that this drop, which is only to be expected, does not seriously damage the quality of the scoring.*

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*Adapted by SDE and extracted from: *How the Essay in the College Board English Composition is Scored.* Gertrude Conlan. ETS, 1978.

## APPENDIX C:

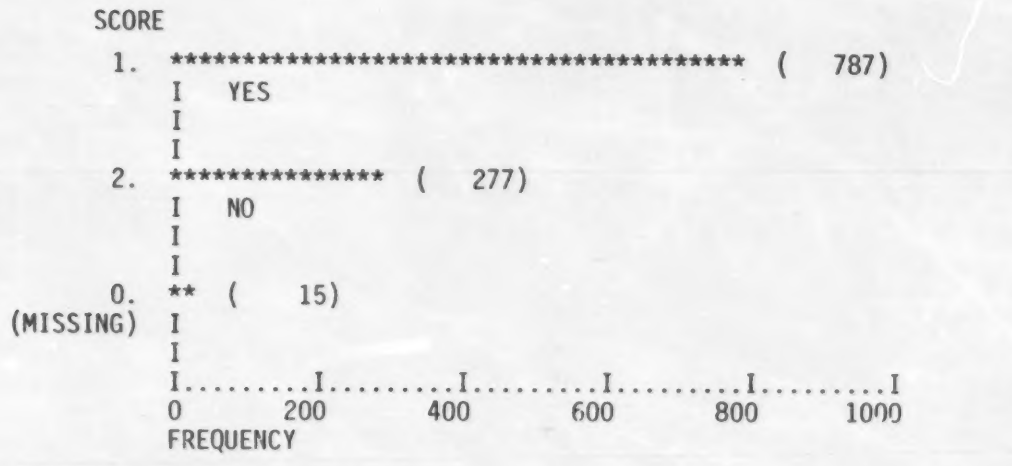
## A STATISTICAL SUMMARY

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Two sets of information were generated as a result of the writing sample. First, a distribution of the way students performed (raw scores) is provided to show the range of quality and achievement in the sample. A bar graph of performance on each of the four tasks is shown with a brief description.

At the end of this section, the correlation coefficients are provided and described. Correlations are used to describe the relationship--or, in one sense, the extent of agreement--between the score on a paper given by the first reader and the score on the same paper given by the second reader. Few similar writing samples in other states have achieved correlations as high as were achieved in the present sample.

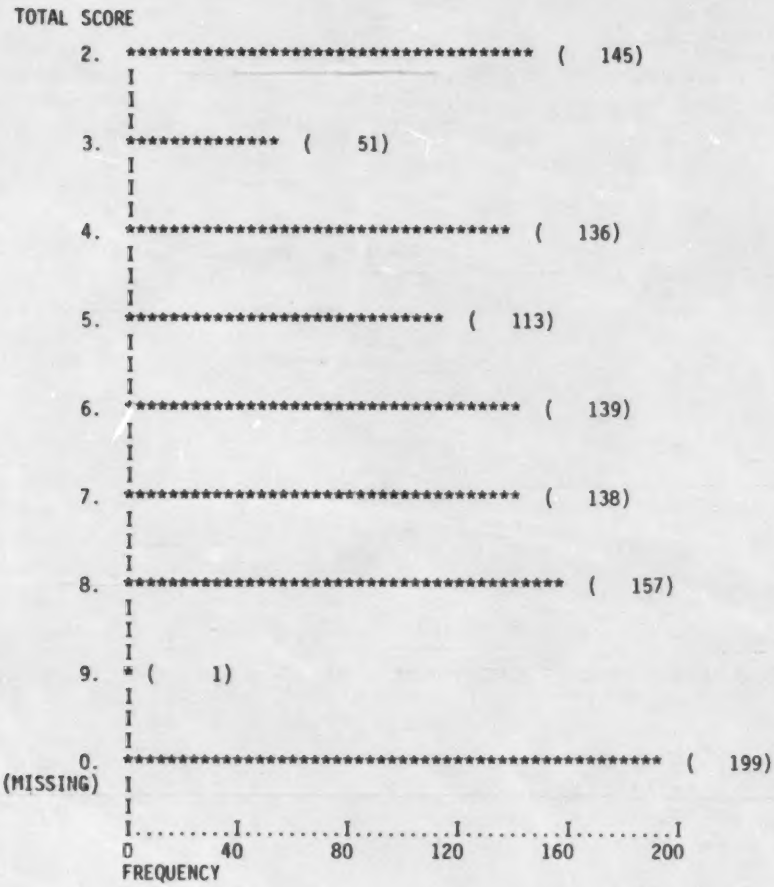
### TASK I: APPLICATION FORM




| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MEAN | 1.260 | MEDIAN | 1.176 | STD DEV | 0.439 |
| VALID CASES | 1064 | MISSING CASES | 15 | | |

Of the 1064 students who attempted this task, 73.97% performed satisfactorily. The description of student performance on Task I found in the body of this report explains the most common errors the remaining 26.03% of the students made in completing the application form.

## TASK II: BUSINESS LETTER

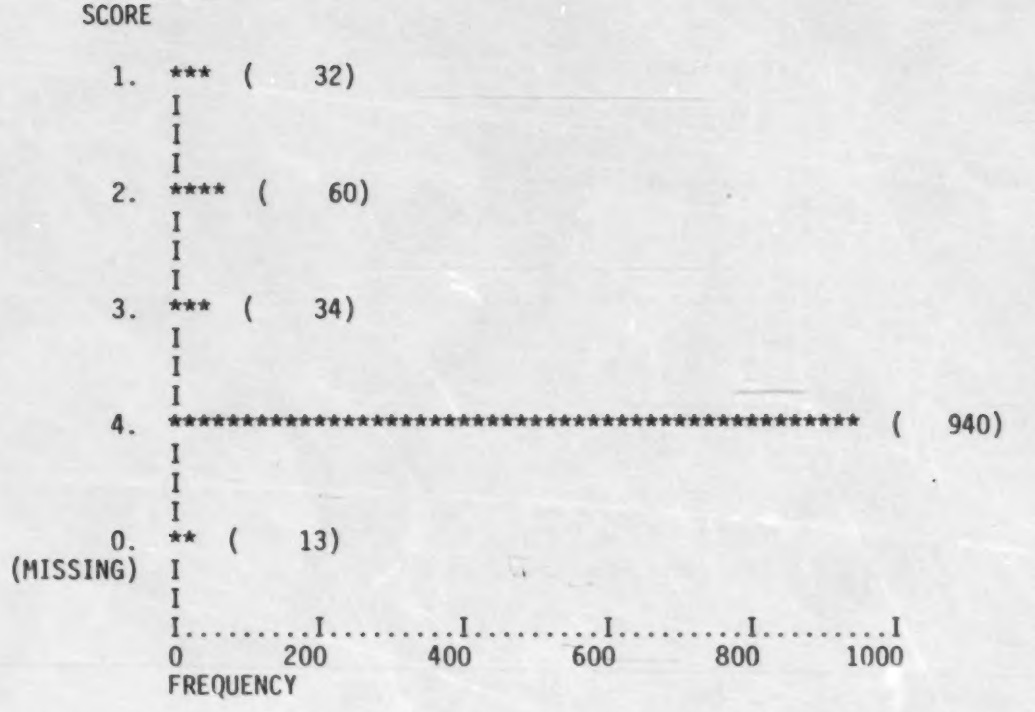



| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MEAN | 5.242 | MEDIAN | 5.456 | STD DEV | 2.055 |
| VALID CASES | 880 | MISSING CASES | 199 | | |

Due to an error in the instructions provided, one school district participating in the sample chose not to complete the business letter. This accounts for the 199 missing cases. The numbers listed under "Total Score" indicate the combined score of two raters. Thus, a paper which received a score of "2" from one reader and a score of "3" from the second reader is listed as a "5." Since the highest possible total score (two ratings of "4") is "8," the case listed as a "9" does not represent one truly outstanding paper, but rather an error in recording procedure.

The mean score of all students completing this task was 5.2. This indicates that on the average student papers received independent scores slightly higher than a "2" and a "3" combined or better. Given the scoring guide used in rating the business letter, it is clear that 77.7% of all students completing the task (683 out of 879) know the appropriate components and format of the business letter and are able to execute the letter with varying degrees of proficiency.

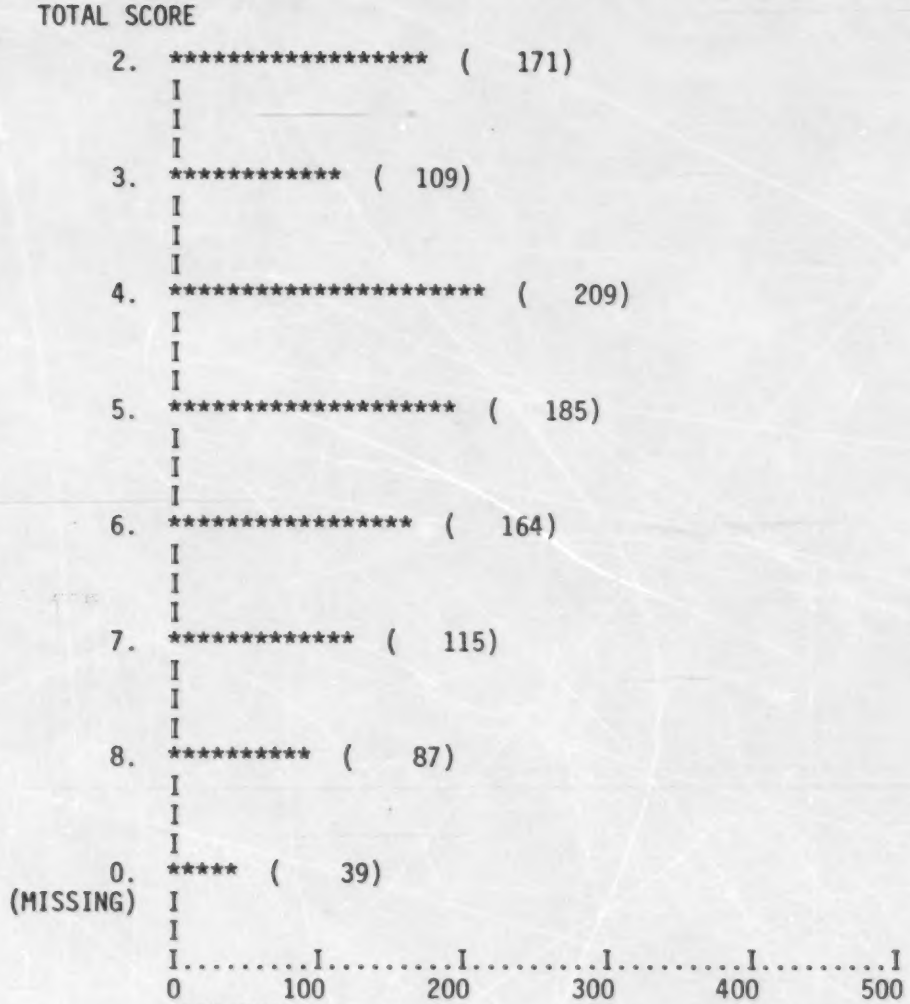
## TASK III: ANNOUNCEMENT




| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MEAN | 3.765 | MEDIAN | 3.933 | STU DEV | 0.687 |
| VALID CASES | 1066 | MISSING CASES | 13 | | |

Student performance on the third task, rendering a transcript of a conversation into an abbreviated announcement, indicates that only 7.69% of the students omitted one or more pieces of information noted as crucial in the scoring guide used for this task. Most students, 88.2%, received the highest score allowed by the scoring guide upon review by one rater.

TASK IV: REMINISCENCE ESSAY




| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MEAN | 4.726 | MEDIAN | 4.668 | STD DEV | 1.839 |
| VALID CASES | 1040 | MISSING CASES | 39 | | |

Task IV was the only one in the sample scored in a truly holistic fashion, not influenced at all by the recommendations of a scoring guide. As such, it should be noted that the distribution of performance more nearly falls into the expected Gaussian or "bell-shaped" curve. The mean score on this task (4.7) indicates that, overall, students achieved combined scores approaching the equivalent of a "5"--derived from independent ratings of "2" and "3" combined or better. This result is very similar to the scoring on Task II, the business letter, and tends to indicate that the students involved in this sample performed in roughly equal patterns on both tasks.

CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS:

The procedure used for determining correlation coefficients was the Kendall *tau* ($\tau$). The Kendall was selected because the coefficients derived are more meaningful when the data contain a large number of tied ranks as was the case with the present data. The Kendall was also chosen because of its ability to classify a relatively large number of cases (1079) into a small number of categories (1-4). Although the absolute values derived are generally lower than those derived through the use of the Spearman, the risk of reporting an inflated degree of agreement between raters is avoided.

The correlation coefficients for all raters on Task II and Task IV were .8083 and .8165 respectively. These two indexes are meaningful when it is understood that 1.00 would indicate perfect agreement between raters. These correlations were found to be significant at the .001 level. Simply stated, this means that, given the same conditions, these raters would be in disagreement fewer than one time out of 1000. It also indicates that a major portion of the variance between raters has been accounted for.

Mean Scores:

Task II = $\bar{X}$ 5.247 Std. Dev. 2.055

Task III = $\bar{X}$ 3.765 Std. Dev. 0.687

Task IV = $\bar{X}$ 4.726 Std. Dev. 1.839

Percent receiving "Yes" Task I = 73.97%

Percent receiving a score of "5" or more (1st rater "2"; 2nd rater "3"; or better):

Task II = 50.8%

Task IV = 51.1%

Percent receiving a score of "6" or more (both raters "3" or better):

Task II = 40.3%

Task IV = 34.0%